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ABSTRACT

Although collaborative learning is most commonly used in modern writing classes, an experiment in collaborative learning was conducted with a beginning drawing class at California University of Pennsylvania. Students (elementary education majors) were paired and asked to produce a single drawing of a still life. They were then asked to repeat the process two more times. The project resulted in improvements in the work of the students and changes in their understanding of how to go about doing a still-life drawing. Besides contact with people, writers and artists are also inspired by the works of their fellow artists, which establishes the social nature of artistic work and of learning. No scientist, and no artist, can establish a theory or genre alone; knowledge and art are what a community of scientists and artists say they are, for the time being. One thing that teachers first trying out collaborative pedagogies always notice is the new vitality, the charged atmosphere that group work and collaborative work bring to the classroom. Also, obviously, the students learn from each other: when one gets an idea or insight, the other hears of it immediately, and often reacts by adding something of his or her own to it, so that they both end up with a perception that neither could have developed alone. The important thing is that the pedagogy seems to work in art classes. (Six drawing samples and two writing samples are attached.) (MG)

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# Using Collaborative Writing Pedagogy in the Art Classroom

*Paper Presented at the West Virginia Art Education Association Fall Conference, October 6-7, 1989, Shepherdstown, West Virginia*

by
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**ABSTRACT**

Discusses ways in which collaborative pedagogies developed by composition specialists can be transferred to the art classroom, including both studio and art history courses. Provides theoretical background for collaborative learning. Describes an experiment in which elementary education majors in a beginning drawing class were asked to work collaboratively to produce a single drawing. Two maturational advances occurrred, and were retained afterward when the students went back to drawing alone: first, students began using the whole drawing surface; second, students became selective about what they would draw from a still life model. Subjects also showed a decline in drawing apprehension as a result of the collaborative experience.

You may be wondering why an English professor should be here as a co-presenter at an art conference. It turns out that the ideas about teaching art which we are going to present to you today come from new pedagogies developed by scholars and researchers in composition teaching over the last 30 years, and especially the last 10 years. The experiments I am conducting in my art classes were, in their first rough form, suggested by Bill, using writing pedagogies as models. We are now attempting to carry out the

052116

pedagogies, fine tune them, take notes on what's happened in class, and evaluate the results. Together, down the road, we hope to design approaches new to both composition and art instruction. For the moment, we are busy translating workable pedagogies from the one discipline to the other.

So far, this transferral has centered on what is called "collaborative learning." It is common in a modern writing class for students to be assigned to groups responsible for helping one another develop texts; it is also common for students to work together collaboratively, in pairs or as teams, in producing a single text--something that composition researchers found was common in the professional workplace.

The particular experiment I will describe today involves that second kind of collaborative learning, the kind that comes from joint effort. The subjects were elementary education majors in a beginning drawing class at California University of Pennsylvania. They had the usual apprehension about drawing that one finds in non-art majors taking a required art course. After several weeks of instruction on technique and composition, I paired students (careful only to avoid matching very weak students) and asked each pair to produce a single drawing of a stilllife. They were then asked to repeat the process two more times. The entire collaborative experience took up a week of classwork.

I think you will find--as we did--that the results were interesting.The interaction between students did not lead to the kind of disaster one would expect from "the blind leading the blind," but instead resulted in two important

improvements in the work of the students, changes in their understanding of how to go about doing a still-life drawing. These changes, which we interpret to be maturational jumps, occurred without any intervention on my part. And most importantly, the changes were retained after the students split up and once again began drawing by themselves, again with me staying in the background, offering advice only when approached.

Besides the artistic improvements, which I will describe later when I show you some of the drawings, the students gained a great deal of confidence out of the experience. You will notice a timidness in the "before" drawings, the faintness of the line seemingly an attempt to hide the work from critical eyes. The drawings done "after" the collaborative experience, by contrast, are dark, strong, unabashed.

As artists and art teachers, we may at first find the idea of collaboration in the production of a work of art to be antithetical to our understanding of the value of art as linked to the genius of the individual mind, and to the artist's personal skill and unique style. That version of the artist--which Bill and I reject--is similar to what had been, in the minds of English teachers, the common view of the writer not long ago. In the popular imagination still, the writer-as-artist is envisioned as a lonely soul pacing his loft, tormented by those tragedies of life that he will eventually transform into a brilliant manuscript. But, as Lisa Ede, a contemporary rhetorician has written, "...the romanticized image of the writer struggling alone until inspiration strikes is hardly accurate.....Most writers actually alternate between periods of

independent activity, composing alone at the desk or computer, and social interactions, meeting with friends, colleagues, or team members for information, advice, or responses to drafts."[1]

Besides the contact with people, writers and artists are also inspired by the works of their fellow artists--the literature and pictures that define art for a given era. For the nature of art does not spring from the head of any one individual, no matter how important or creative a figure; what shall pass as art is an agreement among artists, and perhaps others such as patrons and critics; it is a consensus that for the time being at least, art shall be done this way or that way.

I am attempting here to establish the social nature of artistic work and of learning. To do that, let me turn to Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science who has had a profound influence on our colleagues in English departments over the last decade, at least among those interested in writing. In his best known book, The *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn presents a picture of the march of science which, quite interestingly, looks a lot like the history of art, as well. Let me give a very brief overview, and as I do, when I mention science--you think of art history.

Kuhn sees science as alternating between two modes: "normal science" and revolution. During the periods of normal science, everyone agrees about what is basically true and people go about the business of experimenting and producing large amounts of new scientific data. A period of "normal art" would be one in which a particular genre has been accepted

and artists are busily creating another chapter for Janson.

For Kuhn, and for others nowadays in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and cognitive science, knowledge is widely understood to be socially constituted and dependent upon consensus. What constitutes the vision of scientific truth under which productive activity takes place is a temporary agreement, nothing more. Unfortunately--or perhaps thankfully--these agreements regularly break down. In science, the very researchers working under a particular theory eventually undermine that theory by digging up too much anomalous or ill-fitting data--evidence and phenomena that the theory cannot explain. Then comes a period of revolution, or "paradigm shift," to use Kuhn's term, in which a new paradigm or model--one which better explains the evidence--struggles with the old paradigm for acceptance. Kuhn writes: "Almost always the men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change."[2] In other words, wherever you go, it's the old masters versus the young Turks. The Monets versus the Gauguins. And the young Turks often win--but only if they can produce their own community of followers, their own consensus. No scientist, and no artist, can establish a theory or genre alone; knowledge and art are what a community of scientists and artists say they are, for the time being.

Let's take an example. Let's look at an innovator, the founder of a new school of art, a loner who snubbed his nose at society and went off to work alone among the natives of a primitive island, a people naive about Western art, unable to

influence him--Monsieur Paul Gauguin. Surely this man was independent minded; surely his genius was unique. But to begin with, Gauguin learned his art in Paris; it did not come to him in flash of inspiration. When dissatisfied with Impressionism and looking for a new direction, he turned not inward but outward to other periods or styles of art--Medieval and primitive African. And in the end, his new "symbolic" art doesn't look that much different from the Impressionism it grew out of. The strong, bright colors and the shadeless flatness are still there, just as they are in his post-Impressionist contemporaries, Van Gogh and Cezanne. Whatever is new in Gauguin--or anyone else--is not wholly new but a small accretion based on a continuim of development that goes back centuries, perhaps millenniums.

Suppose you sailed to Tahiti and knocked on the door of Gauguin's hut, and when he emerged, you showed him a picture by Rubens, representing it as your own and asking for his criticism and advice. We imagine Gauguin pulling on his beard and saying, "Well, it's an amusing and accurate rendition of nature, but it's not art." And if you showed him instead a Jackson Pollock splatter painting, we imagine him tugging on his ear and saying, "Well, it's an interesting design, but it's not art."

Where exactly does an artist like Gauguin get his understanding of what constitutes art? Of what the limitations on originality are, of what the range of the possible is? He must get that sense from the community of art and artists that he knew in his lifetime. He can borrow from great distances, but he can understand the nature of art only from

the people around him, and he is forever constrained by them. No matter how far he travels in a boat.

Art, like science, like literature, like knowledge, is a social construction. And learning--becoming an artist--is always a social act, a search for the skills and methods of joining an established community of artists, if only to ultimately lead that community down a new path.

Where do teachers fit into all of this? According to Ken Bruffee, in his important essay "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," "Teachers are defined in this instance as those members of a knowledge community who accept the responsibility for inducing new members into the community."[3] Teachers are individuals who already possess the necessary knowledge and skill to belong.What they teach is membership, a shared understanding of what artists do--or are doing at the moment--as well as how they do it.

Outside the school yard, Ken Bruffee writes, "the rest of the world now works collaboratively almost as a general principle."

Beyond the classroom, not only collaborative work but also collaborative learning is the norm. And indeed, here we are today--meeting as a group at this conference--to share our ideas and learn from one another.

An artist or writer learns her craft by observing what others have done and are doing, by talking with colleagues, by seeking criticism and feedback, even advice.

Oddly, inside the classroom, we have a special name for this kind of learning. We call it "cheating."

And it is usually not allowed. When little Johnny peeks over to see what Sally has written, or when Mary looks at Bob's picture to get an idea for herself, both, if found out, may be disgraced as cheats or copy cats. But that kind of sharing of ideas is exactly what artists and writers do outside the schoolyard. It is how they learn their craft, it is how they keep their work from becoming old-fashioned and irrelevant, it is how they stay on the far edge of innovation so that they can make their incremental contributions to newness.

If learning is social, if it requires interactions with one's peers and colleagues, why do we insist in our schoolrooms that each student learn in complete isolation from his classmates? This is a question that our colleagues in English have been asking themselves recently; it is a question educationists have been addressing to deaf ears for many decades.

The message is beginning to get through, however. The modern writing classroom is designed to allow students to form an amateur discourse community, one which seeks to evolve into something more complex and professional, as represented by the teacher, who as creative writer or an academic writer, serves as a model. Writing teachers are now encouraged to share their work in progress--and their problems with that work--with their students.

Even such a conservative institution as Harvard's Medical School has just undergone a complete revision of its approach to training doctors, shifting from a lecture/passive-listener approach, in which the teacher is the only authority, to a collaborative approach in which students working together in

small groups are largely responsible for their own learning. This shift represents a change in perception of the doctor as one who knows specific things to one who creatively responds to new situations. The Harvard experiment, which is being documented by PBS's *Nova* series, is one of the latest outgrowths of an experiment undertaken in the 1950's by M.L. Abercrombie and described in her book *The Anatomy of Judgement*. I wish to talk about this subject for a moment because we see the Harvard Medical School model as an appropriate one for art history classes.

Diagnosis is perhaps the most crucial and most creative aspect of medical practice. Ken Bruffee, whom I quoted earlier, neatly summarizes Abercrombie's study of how this art is learned:

> Abercrombie began her important study by observing the scene that most of us think is typical of medical education: the group of medical students with a teaching physician gathered around a ward bed to diagnose a patient. Then she made a slight but crucial change in the way that such a scene is usually played out. Instead of asking each individual medical student in the group to diagnose the patient on his or her own, Abercrombie asked the whole group to examine the patient together, discuss the case as a group, and arrive at a consensus--a single diagnoses agreed to by all.
>
> When she did this, what she found was that students who learned diagnosis collaboratively in this way acquired better medical judgement faster than individual students working alone.[4]

It is our belief that students in an art history course, given, let's say, an obscure drawing by Signorelli and asked to work collaboratively on identifying the artist and to justify

their decision in a collaborative essay, will learn more about Italian Renaissance art than students who sit together but unconnected, in a dark room, snoozing through a dreary lecture and a slideshow controlled by the teacher.

It is our belief also that students who work alone in a drawing class will not learn nearly as much as those who have been assigned to groups and thereby have formed small communities of artists, albeit learning artists. In such a classroom, students would talk to each other about their work, criticize, make suggestions, help each other by showing how something is done. When one person learns a trick, everyone learns it; when one person notices something the teacher did in her own drawing in progress, the insight is passed on.

In addition to the group association, we believe that collaborative production of a single product can be as effective a pedagogy in art studio courses as it has been in writing courses. As you recall, in my experiment--and I'm going to show a few slides in just a moment--the students were paired and asked to produce three still life drawings of an arrangement of the usual junk on a table, working together on each drawing.

The students learned two things from their collaboration. First, they progressed from making little postage stamp pictures in the middle of the drawing surface to making a large picture that took over the whole piece of paper, parts of the still life flying off the edges.

Second, instead of drawing an horizon, or outlining the whole still life, and then filling in, they took a portion of the

junk pile that look interesting to them and made it the whole picture. In other words, they behaved like artists, not merely reproducing what's out there, but selecting from nature that which appealed to their artistic sensibilities--for the first time, seeing art in nature.

In addition, I think you will notice that these non-art majors have also overcome their timidness, their drawing apprehension, as a result of collaboration.

Let me show examples of student art.

**(Readers: See Figures attached to the end of this paper for a sample)**

Conclusion

It is hard to say exactly how students learn through collaborative work. My research partner, William Murdick, has in his files some papers written by two 7th graders who were classified "learning disabled" in the domain of language. On their own, if asked to write a personal narrative, they could manage about a half page of almost formless, error-ridden, shallow text. One day their progressive teacher, Susan Williamson, put them together at a microcomputer and told them to produce a single text. They proceeded to write a long basketball story in which a self-effacing anti-hero manages to save the day; the story is witty and dramatic, well-structured and relatively error free; it twists its way to a climax that is not wholly predictable.

How were they able to do this? How were my drawing students able to make jumps that many of them wouldn't have made by the end of the semester, if they had been working alone?

We can guess that the animation that arises during interaction causes them to dig deeper into themselves. One thing that teachers first trying out collaborative pedagogies always notice is the new vitality, the charged atmosphere that group work and collaborative work bring to the classroom. Also, obviously, the students learn from each other: when one gets an idea or an insight, the other hears of it immediately, and often reacts by adding something of her own to it, so that they both end up with a perception that neither could have produced alone.

But in the end, the important thing is that the pedagogy seems to work in art classes. The pictures I have shown you reveal a new boldness and artfulness in the students' work after collaboration. We ask you to join us in discovering the ways in which a collaborative approach can add to the effectiveness of art teaching.

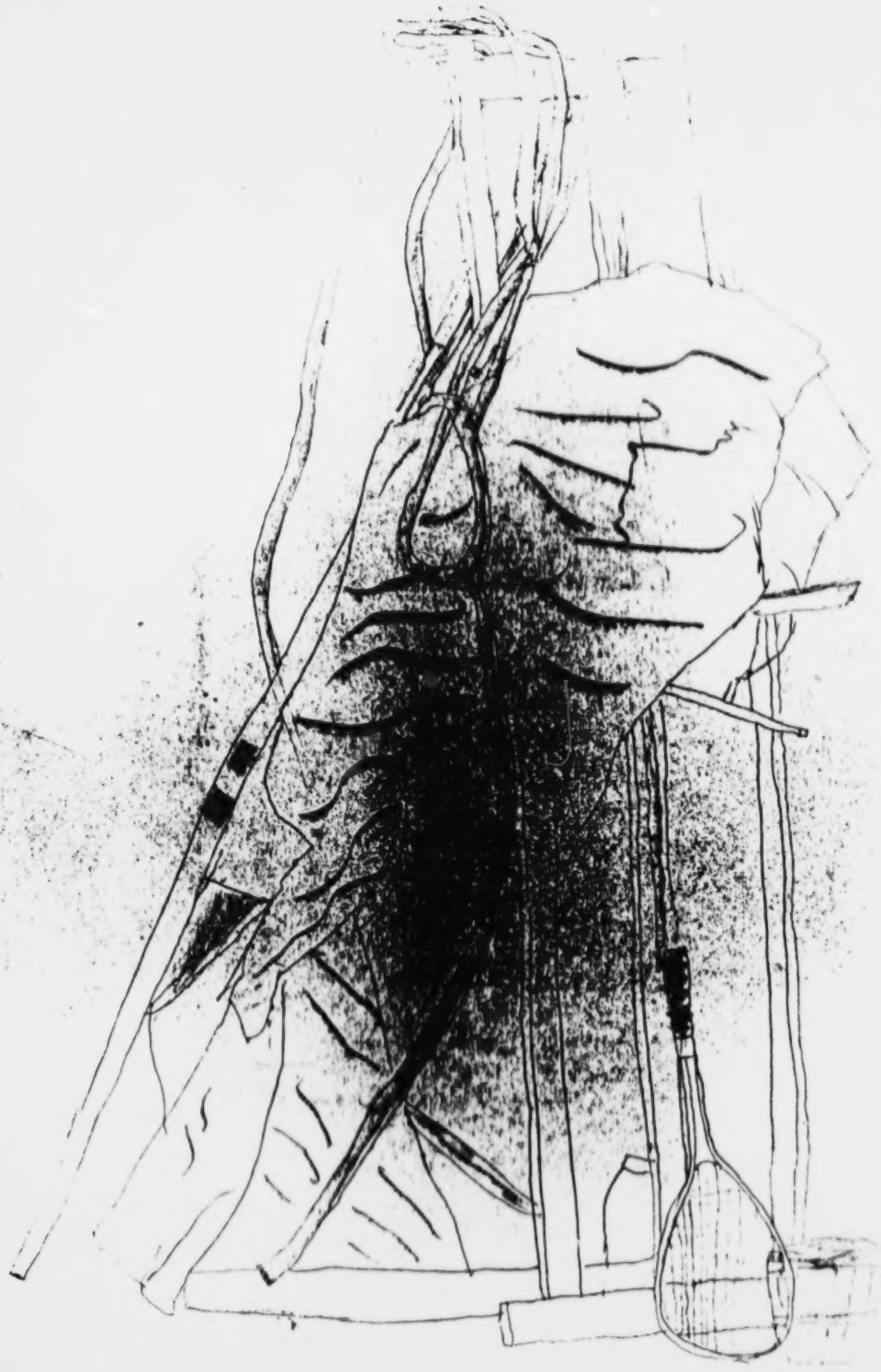
Notes

[1]Ede, L (1989). *Work in progress: A guide to writing and revising*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
See pg. 15 for the quotation. For other ERIC documents by Ede on collaborative learning, see ED 282 212, "The Case for Collaboration"; ED 293 151, "What is Social about Writing as a Social Process"; and ED 266 481, "The Concept of Authorship: An Historical Perspective."

[2]Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
See pg. 90 for quotation.

[3]Bruffee, K. A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the "Conversation of Mankind." *College English*, 46, 635-652.
For other articles by Bruffee on the implications of the social nature of knowledge, see "Liberal Education, Scholarly Community, and the Authority of knowledge" in *Liberal Education*, 71.3, 1985, and "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay" in College English, 48.8, 1986.

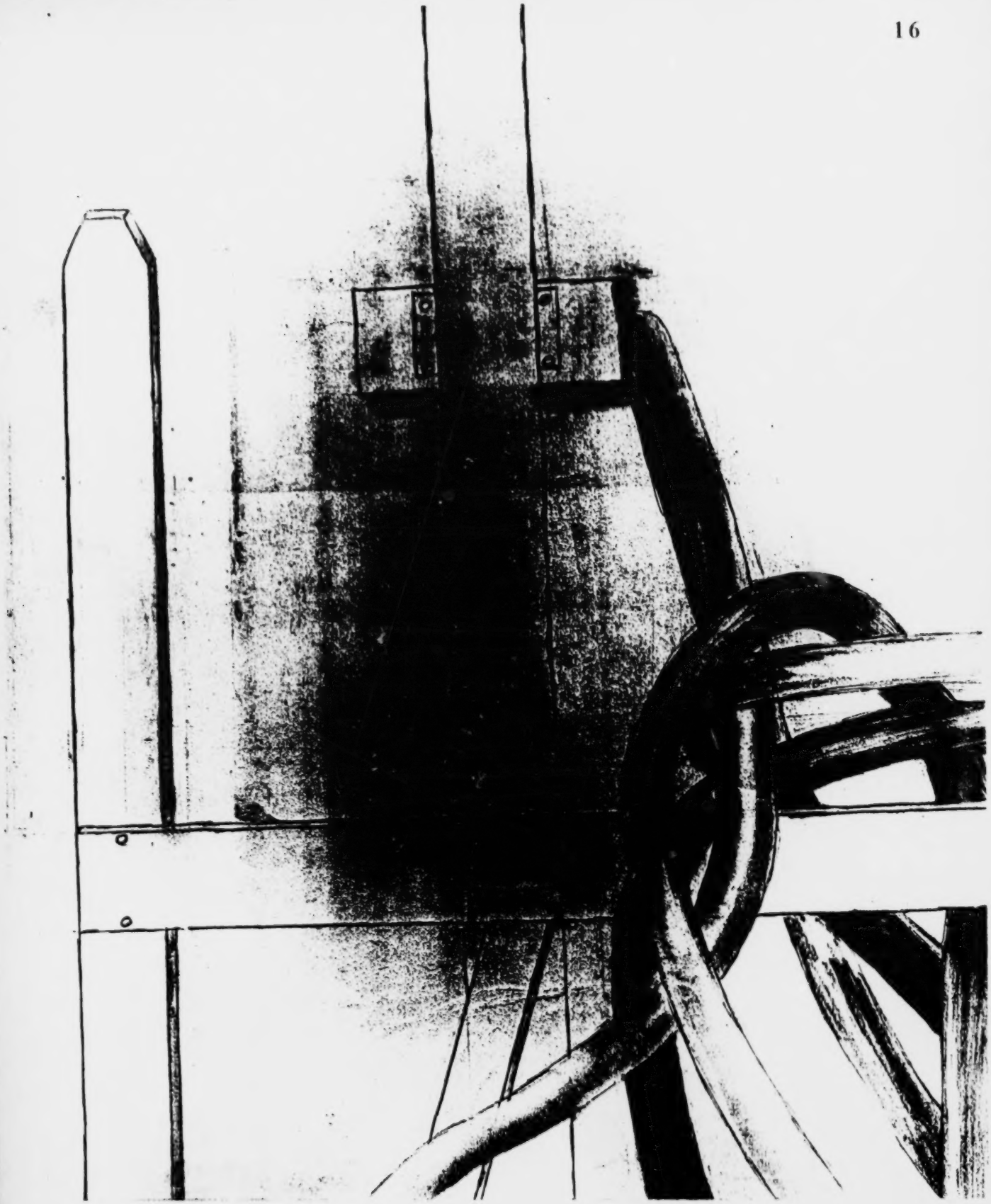
[4]Bruffee, K. A. (1987, March/April). The art of collaborative learning. *Change*.



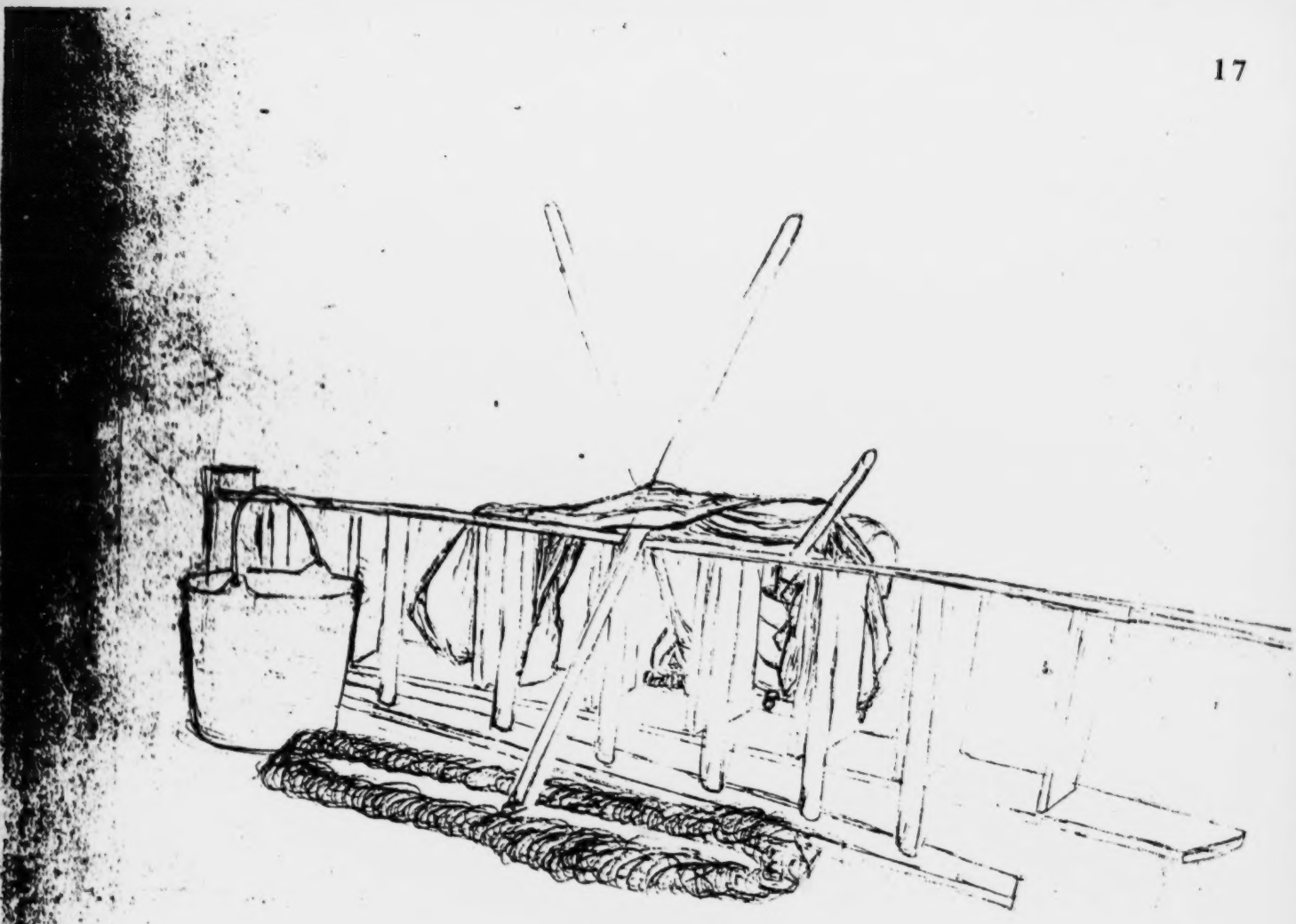
**Student #1** -- Before collaborative experience.
Note the outlining approach and the timidity.

**Students #1 and #2** -- A collaborative effort. Note the use of the whole drawing surface and the selective focus. (No pre-collaborative drawing for Student #2 is avaliable.)

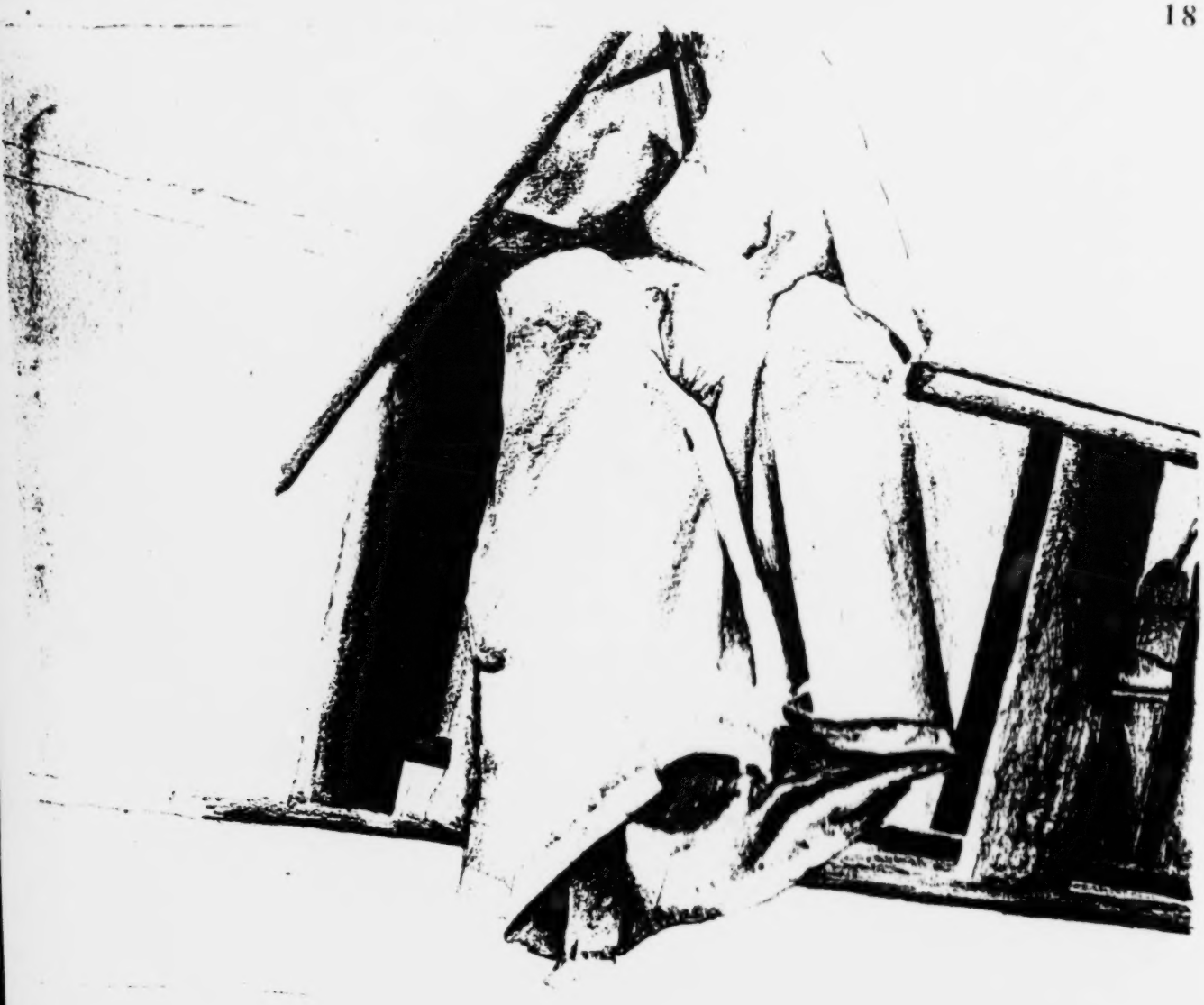
**Student #1** -- After collaborative experience.



**Student #2** -- After collaborative experience.



**Student #3** -- Before collaboration.



**Student #3** -- After collaboration.

**A "No-help" Paper Written Alone by One of Two 7th Grade**

**"Learning Disabled" Collaborators**

**(Errors and formatting have been presserved)**

Going to A Cave And Falling Down A Hill

Dan Jason and I were going to a cave on sunday the 15 of Novenber at noon. I went up Jason's house and then we called Dan he came up Jason's house then we left for the cave. We went on the road till we found the tral we talked to this guy at his house for about five minutes the we contined on the tral.

Then we cam to a nouther tral we folled the tral to the cave when we got to the cave.

When climbed down to it and worked inside it for about an hour then Jason toled me to go to the top of the hill and tie a rope to a tree.

As I was climbing back down the hill the rope broke I was falling down the hill. I grabed a nother rope but it broke to. I fell over the edge and onto the rocks.

When I got up I thought I broke my leg and arm when I got back up the the hill we becided to leave so I hobiled home.

**Text Produced Through the Collaboration of LD 7th Grader of Previous Page and another LD 7th-Grader.**
**(Teacher observed roughly equal contributions by both writers)**

It was Feb. 9, 1988, and it was the most important basketball game of my career. Why because it was in front of the junior-high student body. It started at 1:15 p.m. My name is Loney "Bip" Roberts, and I am a starting bench warmer. I am also known as a pine rider. It sounds pretty dumb that this is the most important game in my career; even though I will probably sit on the bench, today things can change.

We were in the locker room thinking about the game, but I was thinking about going home and watching T.V.. I was not thinking about the game because I don't get to play. The game began and I was a pine rider again. At the end of the first quarter we were losing 10 to 6. At the beginning of the second quarter Joe Shmoe got hurt. My coach said, "Loney get over here". Loney said, "you want me?". "Yes you!" "Get over here." I went over to my coach, and went into the game for Joe Shmoe.

When I went into the game we were losing 18 to 10. I was playing the point guard. When I got the ball. I dribbled up the court and passed the ball to Tom Bomb and he passed it back to me and I shot and maid it. My first shot of the year and I made it.

It was halftime and we were losing 24 to 18. In the locker room the coach was yelling at us but I was day dreaming about the shot I made. The Third quarter started and I was still in the game. I was playing well by the end of the third quarter. I had three steals and six points. We were only down 34 to 31. At the beginning of the fourth quarter I was still in the game. We got the ball and started going down the court. Jack Black passed me the ball and I shot it for a three pointer and I made it. The game was tied 34 to 34. The game passed quickly and then before I new it there was 15 seconds left. Chuck passed me the ball and I dribbled down the court and lost the ball and they scored. The score was 40 to 38 and we were losing with 10 seconds left in the game. There was a time out and the coach was telling us what to do. This time I was not day dreaming I was paying attention. We got are play from are coach and was on the court. Jack Black throw the ball in play and I went down court I lost the ball again but I got it back and shot from the three point line. The clock ticked down 5,4,3,2,1 just as the buzzer went off. The ball went in the hoop and we won the game 41 to 40. That was the biggest game of my life.